UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Rural and Urban:
Experiences of Female School Teachers who Taught in Alberta, 1905-1930

By

Freda Joanne Molenkamp

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

in

Family Ecology and Practice

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Rural and Urban: Experiences of Female School Teachers who Taught in Alberta, 1905-1930** submitted by **Freda J. Molenkamp** in partial fulfilment for the degree of **Master of Science in Family Ecology and Practice**.

Dr. Maryanne Doherty-Poirier
Supervisor

Dr. Janet Fast

Dr. Henry Hodysh

December 5 1997
Date

Dedication

To all the brave pioneer school teachers who taught in rural and/or urban schools throughout Alberta;

Your dedication and courage have become a source of inspiration for me.

Abstract

This study examines the daily lives of twelve female, rural and/or urban school teachers who taught in Alberta between the years of 1905 to 1930. It compares the reciprocal impact of the setting (rural or urban) upon the interaction between the female school teacher and the physical, social and societal/community environments. This reciprocal relationship is built upon the Human Ecological Framework which acknowledges the interaction between individuals and their surrounding environments. Historical methodology was used in conjunction with the Human Ecological Framework to identify data sources and guide the data analysis process. It was determined that there are both similarities and differences between rural and urban school teachers' reciprocal interactions with their environments, but the greatest impact occurred between the rural school teachers and their societal/community environment. Suggestions for further research in the areas of education history in Alberta, the application of Human Ecology in historical studies, and specifically, the relevance of family studies in historical research are outlined and proposed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Description of Study

Introduction

> 'I sometimes think the Prairie Provinces were built up by the labours of pioneer teachers,' Julie would think on such a morning as she recalled all those hopeful young Normal School graduates going out to teach in the bush country of Manitoba or the Dust Bowl of Saskatchewan, some of them mere slips of girls stranded alone in bachelor shacks in communities of alien people. She wondered that so many had survived at all, and had stuck it out, alongside the people, through droughts, frosts, hail and snowstorms (Patterson, 1986, p. 100).

The young, female school teachers who taught in the Canadian West definitely had many stories to tell. Some have written them in their diaries, others in the letters they wrote to their families back home, and some have even recently told about their teaching days in local histories and other historical documents. But a collection of these women's stories has not been frequently assembled.

This statement is also true of the many female teachers who taught in rural and/or urban schools in Alberta between the years of 1905 to 1930. The women who taught in these schools during these years have experienced many unique adventures and situations surrounding their moves to the Canadian West, and their subsequent teaching experiences, but their stories have rarely, if ever, been penned (Patterson, 1986). As a result, an intriguing part of Alberta's heritage has never been discovered, and, in the researcher's opinion, needs to be explored in order to obtain a better understanding of the rural and urban

school teachers' role in Alberta's educational history.

Background

The building of the school house and the arrival of the new teacher was a signal of progress to settlers of new communities in the Canadian West. Alberta, being the last frontier to be settled in Canada, had the advantage of being able to hire school teachers who were trained in Normal Schools in other parts of Canada. The Winnipeg Normal School and other such schools in Eastern Canada had been established prior to the turn of the twentieth century (Chalmers, 1967). Women and men who were trained in these schools were available to teach in the newly settled Province of Alberta. Many pioneer families highly valued the opportunity to have their children enrolled in a formal educational program, and worked hard to organize school houses in their districts.

When the Province of Alberta was formed on September 1, 1905, it was not called upon to create a school system. There were 602 school districts organized within its boundaries, and the Alberta Act had also been created. The Alberta Act was the School Ordinance of the North-West Territories, and it became the school law of the newly formed Province of Alberta.

> This law provided for the organization of local school districts, the election of boards of trustees, and the organization of a Department of Education under a Minister of the Crown; and it prescribed the powers and the functions of each. To the Minister was assigned the power to create new school districts, to alter existing boundaries, to arrange for training and certification of teachers, for inspection of schools, and for examination and promotion of pupils, and to prescribe courses of study

> and text books. The school boards were given authority to: erect school buildings, borrow money through the issue of their debentures, levy and collect taxes, engage teachers, and generally manage the school and administer the affairs of the district subject to the powers vested in the Minister (Department of Education, 1935, p. 1).

Teaching in either a rural or urban school in Alberta between the years of 1905 and 1930 was not an easy task for teachers. Life on the Prairies provided many obstacles and challenges that had to be met. The harsh climate, the social isolation and the newness of Alberta society were elements that needed to be addressed by every teacher. Teaching in rural or urban communities in Alberta during these early years provided many unique experiences for young female school teachers.

This study describes the daily life experiences, rather than the classroom experiences, of female school teachers who taught in rural and urban settings in Alberta between the years of 1905 to 1930, compares the differences in the life and work experiences of the rural and urban school teachers, and offers an explanation of differences that existed. This study focuses on female school teachers, rather than on women who taught, because there were many women who taught in informal settings and were not certified as teachers. By addressing the group of women in this study as female school teachers, it is clear that each women was a certified school teacher who taught in a recognized school.

There were three types of school districts in Alberta during these years: town, village and rural. Rural was defined in the legislation as a district which does

not embrace a town or village within its limits (Department of Education, 1935) and urban was considered to be the population living in all incorporated cities, towns and villages of any size. Rural and urban (city, town and village) are defined in this study according to how the women described the communities in which they taught. Each of the twelve women included in this study stated whether she lived and taught in a rural or in an urban setting.

Theoretical Framework

The Human Ecological Framework is developed from the principles of Human Ecology theory. Human Ecology theory is unique in its focus on humans as both biological organisms and social beings in constant interaction with their many different environments (Sontag & Bubolz, 1988). Ecology seeks a vision of the whole; a holistic view which is not merely the sum of the parts, but rather, it is the interdependence among the parts. Everything is interrelated in some way (Sontag & Bubolz, 1988, Vaines, 1980). Individuals do not stand in isolation. Rather, they are influenced by their surrounding environments, and they have the opportunity to influence these environments as well.

Four main underlying assumptions of the Human Ecological Framework (Sontag & Bubolz, 1988) which are fundamental to this study are:

1) All parts of the environment are interrelated and influence each other.

2) Individuals interact with multiple environments.

3) Environments do not determine human behaviour but pose limitations and constraints as well as possibilities and

opportunities for individuals.

4) Individuals have varying degrees of control and freedom with respect to environmental interactions.

These underlying assumptions of the Human Ecological Framework have been incorporated into this research study in the following manner:

1) They provided a selection criteria for the sources that will be considered for this study. Only sources that capture or aid in exploring the holistic perspective of female Alberta school teachers' lives were used.

2) They provided the focus of the study. This study provides a rich, holistic description of the lives of the female school teachers who taught in rural and/or urban Alberta between the years of 1905 and 1930 and the impact of each environment.

3) They were incorporated into the analysis of information. This study examines the impact of several environments upon the school teachers' lives and how the school teachers' affected these environments. The environments that were explored are the physical environment, the social environment, and the societal/community environment.

4) They provided the foundation upon which the comparison of the impacts of the rural and urban context will be examined. It was assumed, based upon these guidelines, that the setting would have an impact on one or more of the outlined environments in the teachers' lives, the unique challenges of teaching in a rural community as compared to teaching in an urban centre would be revealed.

Description of the Three Environments

The lives of female school teachers who taught in Alberta between the years 1905 and 1930 were shaped by many environments and some of these women also had the opportunity to have an impact upon their environments as well. The environments which had a profound impact on the teachers' lives include the

physical setting (housing, climate, clothing), the social environment (salaries, relationships, family ties), and the societal/community context (role of the school teacher and the school house, societal guidelines for proper behaviour, provincial and local school board rules). Conversely, some teachers had the opportunity and power to shape some of the environments that affected them. Many rural school teachers spent numerous hours repairing the teacherage and planting trees and flowers in the school yard. Other evidence exists which shows how some of the local school boards decided to 'bend' some of the rules which had been firmly decided upon earlier, especially in the areas of teacher qualifications and salaries. In many communities, especially in the rural areas, the teacher was respected and trusted by parents and often seen as a role model. This role frequently allowed her to mould people's thinking and broaden their understanding about the world around them. The impact that each of the environments had on the female school teacher, and the reciprocal effect she had on some specific environments was largely dependent upon whether the school was in a rural community or urban setting.

Research Questions

Although the data sources which are available are limited in number, it was possible to integrate the available resources to provide a description of the lives of twelve female schoolteachers who taught in Alberta schools between the years 1905 and 1930. Research questions guided the analysis of the data and enabled the researcher to determine the impact of the physical, social and

societal/community environments on the teachers' lives, and the impact the teachers had on these environments.

The main research questions were as follows:

> Is the impact of the physical, social and societal/community environments upon the female school teacher and her impact on these environments different for a female school teacher who taught in a **rural** Alberta community between the years of 1905 and 1930 than it is for a female school teacher who taught in an **urban** centre in Alberta between the years of 1905 and 1930?
>
> If there are differences, what are the possible explanations for these differences?

This study responds to these two research questions, and the results are presented in Chapter 4.

Methodology

The methodology selected for this research is historiography which is the study of the various steps and procedures that historians use in their research (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). In keeping with one paradigm of historiography, a conceptual framework, that is, the Human Ecological Framework, was applied to the historical data.

Data Sources

This study used primary and secondary sources including personal diaries, letters, memoirs, photographs, and Government and official documents to describe the life and work experiences of twelve school teachers. The use of these materials focuses upon the personal accounts of these women, and ways

in which they describe their experiences in their own words.

The primary data sources which focus on female schoolteachers who taught in rural and/or urban Alberta between the years of 1905 and 1930 are limited in quantity and quality. There are some diary collections, and other historical documents and photographs. Many of the documents include receipt books, letters, School Inspector reports, Department of Education Annual Reports, Christmas cards from students and other similar items which were helpful in gathering information that is relevant to this study. The photographs are also important to this study because they portray pieces of the physical environment (what the teacherage looked like, the clothing the teachers wore) and they also provide clues to some of the social activities that many school teachers engaged in (attendance at the Christmas concert and the annual picnic, staff photos, friendships between the teachers and students, interaction of the teachers with the parents of her pupils).

The Human Ecological Framework was used to guide selection and organization of the data. Only female school teachers were selected because the sources that matched the framework were written only by women. Descriptions of the physical, social and societal/community environments were essential parts of the framework, and the researcher discovered that it was only the women's sources which included these essential parts.

Data Analysis

Each of the female school teachers stories and related historical documents

were analysed using the Human Ecological Framework. The data was categorized in relation to the three identified environments (physical, social and societal/community). An analysis of each teacher was written so that the researcher was aware of the specific experiences and challenges each woman encountered. Thereafter, differences and similarities based on the setting (rural and urban) were identified and explored.

Limitations of the Study

The number of available sources limited this study to include only the experiences of twelve school teachers. It is not representative of all Alberta school teachers during this period, but rather, it focuses on the unique experiences of each of the twelve woman represented in this study. The study compares and explains the differences found between individual school teachers in rural and/or urban settings.

It is important to recognize the role of social construction of appropriate behaviour in these documents and also the writer's possible biases. Perhaps not all the women who wrote in their diaries felt completely free to express their true feelings about certain topics. Society did (and still does) place guidelines of conduct upon these women in terms of what was appropriate and what was inappropriate for them to discuss and write. Memoirs written years after an event occurred often reflect an altered memory which casts events in either a more positive or negative light (Touliatos & Compton, 1988, Murphy, 1986, Vaughn-Roberson, 1983).

Some of the women's writings were difficult to read because of the age of the document and also poor penmanship. It was also not always possible for the researcher to understand the context and/or meaning of what has been written in the diary. It was important to recognize that the descriptions, comparisons and explanations in this study are based on the researcher's interpretations of the data sources.

Significance of the Study

This study provides a new perspective on rural and urban school teaching during the settlement years in Alberta. The comparison between rural and urban school teaching has not received much research attention to date, and this study provides a way in which to examine the possible differences that existed between these two settings. Secondly, this study provides an important piece in Alberta's rich history. Alberta's heritage needs to be accurately documented so that it can be better understood.

Although there have been several research studies and written accounts (Penner, 1993, Patterson, 1986, McLeod, 1971, Chalmers, 1967) which portray what life was like for the Prairie teacher, few detailed accounts have documented the daily experiences and challenges that the young female school teachers encountered (Lindgren, 1996, 1992, Charyk, 1981, Charyk, 1974, Charyk, 1968, Cook, 1968), and even fewer resources have compared the experiences of the rural and urban school teachers (Patterson, 1986). Many of

these studies and writings are collections of humorous stories and accounts from students and/or teachers who experienced school life in Alberta during the settlement years. And although these pieces are informative and interesting, they do not provide an understanding about teachers' thoughts, feelings, behaviours and challenges. This aspect of the teachers' lives remains a relatively unknown contributor to understanding prairie social life and growth.

Female schoolteachers have not received, until recent years, the attention of historians (Hoffman, 1994, Cordier, 1992, Patterson, 1986). Female school teachers' stories are largely lost through omission and obscured in the mire of stereotypes of the selfless, lonely, but brave schoolmarm, or the ignorant, mean spirited prude (Cordier, 1992). Although these generalized versions add to our scant number of resources, they do not always portray an accurate picture of what life was really like for a young female teacher who travelled across the country to teach in an Alberta school. It is important to accurately explore the life experiences and challenges that these school teachers faced, and to also reveal the differences between the experiences of the rural and urban school teachers. The account and comparison of the lives of the rural and urban school teachers who taught in Alberta between the years of 1905 and 1930 are significant parts of Alberta's history which need to be uncovered, understood, and acknowledged.

This study accurately portrays the lives of twelve Alberta school teachers and compares their experiences. It is the researcher's hope that those who read this

study will gain a better understanding of the lives of rural and/or urban school teachers who taught during Alberta's first twenty-five years as a province in Canada, and also begin to better appreciate the reciprocal relationship the teachers had with their environments.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter has a three-fold purpose. It provides a general introduction to the research that has been completed in the United States of America, Canada and Alberta related to the history of education, an exploration of the two main types of data sources that are available, and a discussion of the research that needs to be conducted in this area of study

The literature that has been written about American and Canadian school teachers who taught during the early pioneer years is greatly varied but limited in number. Numerous government records and reports pertaining to education, especially in Canada have been preserved and made available. These documents have been extremely valuable in researching the process of implementing education in Canada (Danlyewycz & Prentice, 1991, Carney, 1990), the structure of school houses in the Canadian West (Beck, 1990), the selection of suitable curriculum material, and the establishment of mission schools. Many pioneers have also written their memories so that others may read and appreciate their experiences (Penner, 1993, Chalmers, 1991, Charyk, 1983, Fuller, 1982, McLeod, 1981, Rodenberger, 1981, Zion, 1981, Fair, 1979, Schrimsher, 1972, Charyk, 1974, Charyk, 1968, Chalmers, 1967). The majority

of the pioneers who have written about their school days are pupils who were taught in one-room schools throughout the United States and Canada, but some school teachers have also provided their accounts. The memoirs of both the pupils and their teachers can often be found in local histories and other similar publications.

In many of these collections of anecdotes (Charyk, 1983, Cochrane, 1981, Stamp, 1975, Charyk, 1974, Charyk, 1968), there are photographs of students, their teachers, and of school houses. Personal correspondence, diaries and letters of school teachers are also available but these documents have proven much more difficult to find. There are pieces of information about school teachers who taught in North America, but few researchers have explored this vast area of information.

Research on American School Teachers

The amount of work that has been done in the past in regard to school teachers who taught in rural and/or urban schools in the United States of America is impressive. Many of the pioneer teachers have published their stories (Fuller, 1982, Rodenberger, 1981, Statton, 1981, Zion, 1981, Schrimsher, 1972). Many of these stories centre around daily life experiences and interactions with pupils and members of the local communities. The majority of these teachers taught in rural schools, and the researcher found only minimal work that had documented the urban school teachers' experiences.

The work that has been done in relation to American school teachers is of

great use to this current study because of the many opportunities for comparison in location of data sources, methodology and content analysis using a specific framework. This was noticed especially in Gulliford's (1996) work.

Gulliford (1996) has been exploring the roots of country schools in the United States of America for many years, and recently published a new edition to his book entitled, America's Country Schools. This publication offers a comprehensive look at the many environments that shaped both the young school teachers, and also the schools in each community. The chapter which focused exclusively upon the role of the teacher (Teachers' Lives on the Western Frontier) places a particularly strong emphasis upon the teacher's role in the community, her ability to shape this near environment, and the way in which the community also moulded her life. The method of analysis Guiliford used was deemed appropriate by the researcher of this study in that it provided a more holistic approach to understanding the lives of the school teachers.

Research on Canadian School Teachers

Although preserving Canadian history has always been an essential part of Canadian heritage, the amount of historical research that has focussed specifically on the school teachers that taught throughout the country is limited in number. Once again, several teachers have put together their stories (Fleming & Smyly, 1995, Penner, 1993, Patterson, 1974, Shack, 1973, Shack, 1965) providing Canadians with some understanding about their teaching experiences.

A limited amount of research has been completed with Ontario school teachers and similarly with school teachers in Quebec. Only minimal work has been conducted on the school teachers who taught in Saskatchewan during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Recent research has been published on the history of British Columbia's early school teachers (Barman, 1995, Stephenson, 1995, Fleming & Smyly, 1995, Wilson, 1995, Wilson & Stortz, 1995) and some of these researchers have examined diaries and other historical documents to write descriptive pieces about individual school teachers (Fleming & Smyly, 1995, Wilson, 1995). The writings about the teachers who taught in other provinces and territories in Canada were also few in number.

Research on Alberta School Teachers

Research that has focused on Alberta school teachers who taught in Alberta between the years 1905 and 1930 is minimal. Very few researchers have discussed the impact of the community upon the teacher, and her effect on the community. The available sources which specifically address the lives of Alberta school teachers are often published books and articles which have been written by researchers in the field, or they are memoirs written by pioneer school teachers or students. Many of these books and articles take a general look at several different aspects of every teacher's daily life experiences. The distinction between rural and urban school teachers has rarely been analysed (Wilson, 1992, Patterson, 1986), and the majority of memoir accounts have

focussed upon the lives of rural school teachers in Alberta.

Personal Accounts and Memoirs

John Chalmers, an early school teacher in Alberta, wrote many pieces about the rural school life conditions that existed while he taught (Chalmers, 1991, 1990, 1968, 1967, 1960). One area about which he wrote quite extensively was the teacherages that many rural school teachers lived in (Chalmers, 1991, 1967). Using personal experiences, stories from other rural school teachers and available pictures relating to the teacherages, he was able to provide a rich description of the many different living conditions some rural school teachers found themselves in. Chalmers also wrote two volumes (School of the Foothills Province, and Teachers of the Foothills Province) which provide an account of the general history of education in Alberta.

A second teacher who wrote about teaching in rural and urban Alberta was Maisie Cook. She taught in both rural and urban schools in Alberta and assembled a personal diary about her teaching experiences. In her diary, Maisie describes her life as a young school teacher. She talks about her first day of teaching, the transition of moving, how the urban schools and communities differed from the rural school and communities, and many other interesting topics. Together, her stories and others combine to allow one to better understand life as a school teacher in Alberta, and also the differences and similarities that existed between the rural and urban teaching experiences. Her work is a vital piece of this research study.

A third teacher was John Charyk. He was a rural school teacher who took his teaching training in the Calgary Normal School in 1929 and then accepted a teaching position in the Bryant rural school near Bindloss, Alberta. Later he became the principal of the Chinook Consolidated School at Chinook, Alberta and then a few years after that, he was appointed principal of Hanna High School located in Hanna, Alberta. It was during these years that John developed "a feeling and a love for rural Alberta" (Charyk, 1968), and when he came back to the Bryant rural school some thirty years later, he was shocked to see that progress had taken over as he said, "changing the rural school to a granary!" (Charyk, 1968).

In an attempt to allow future generations to 'relive' the early schooling days in the country schools, Charyk collected stories, photographs, letters and other related correspondence from over one thousand former teachers and pupils who were in rural schools in Alberta between the years of 1900 to approximately 1940. The result was a three-volume set (The Little White Schoolhouse, Pulse of the Community, and Those Bittersweet School Days) which include stories and memorabilia pertaining to almost every aspect of the early schooling days, including the three environments that this study examines (physical, social and societal/community). A heavy emphasis is placed specifically upon the societal/community environment throughout this series as he describes in the title of the second book of his series, Pulse of the Community. Years later, Charyk continued to write about other topics concerning rural education

including the annual Christmas concert and other planned recreational events (Charyk, 1988, 1985, 1983).

Other teachers and pupils have also written their accounts in local community and school histories. Numerous local memoirs have been written and published, many of the accounts focussing specifically upon the establishment of the local school house and providing the names of the many teachers who taught in these schools. Specific incidents and experiences that the teachers and/or pupils encountered are also frequently recalled and shared in these volumes. Unexpected visits of the school superintendent, the 'sleep-overs' in the school house during severe blizzards, and the effects of the drought on school attendance are also discussed in some of the available sources (Penner, 1993, Chalmers, 1990, Jones, 1985, McLeod, 1981, Charyk, 1983), but many of these experiences focus exclusively on the rural Alberta setting.

Research Studies

Several researchers (Crowson, 1992, Woywitka, 1975, Schultz, 1972, Drake, 1971) have documented the historical development of a school district in Alberta, such as Waugh, Edison, and Bruderheim. Each of these researchers has used historical government documents and School Board meeting minutes to trace the establishment of the specific school districts, the building of the school and the hiring of the first teacher. Even though each of these school districts was established and school houses were erected in different areas in Alberta, common problems occurred in each district while it was being

developed. Lack of sufficient funds, difficult people in the communities who tried to stall the process and the lack of qualified teachers were issues that many communities, both rural and urban, had to conquer (Woywitka, 1975, Drake, 1971).

Many researchers have traced the roots of gender inequity in Canadian historical events and practices (Stong-Boag, 1988, Prentice, Boune, Brandt, Light, Mitchinson & Black, 1988, Patterson, 1986, Trofimenkoff & Prentice, 1977) and have identified school teachers in their discussions. In Alberta, as well as in other provinces in Canada, teaching has been and continues to be a classic case of the division of labour by gender. In general, women have held the lower paying jobs at the bottom of the educational occupational ladder, and men have been favoured at the top (Sheehan, 1992). By the turn of the twentieth century, seventy-five percent of those who were employed in the education profession were women (Prentice et al., 1988), but most of these women earned substantially less than their male counterparts, and this was true throughout Canada.

Another area that some researchers have looked at specifically is the rural school problem. The rural school problem surfaced in Alberta during the years of settlement and early prairie development, 1890-1930 (Wilson, 1992).

> Rural education was malfunctioning: 'In the province there was a general lack of interest in education. The trustees were incompetent and the teachers inexperienced. Even when those defects were removed, the lack of interest resulted in insufficient funds...a good deal of this inefficiency might have been overcome through better supervision, but the

> roads and lack of organization made this impossible' (Wilson, 1992, p. 136).

It was often difficult during Alberta's early years to find a teacher who was wiling to teach in a one-room school in a rural community. Many teachers left after only teaching for a month, two weeks, or even only after a few days. The researchers who have studied this rural school problem often conclude that there were several contributing factors to this issue; inexperienced teachers, unorganized 'school boards' and challenging rural conditions including the teacherage, travelling distance to school, social isolation and the harsh Western Canadian climate (Wilson, 1992, Patterson, 1988).

Wilson (1992) is one of the few researchers who continues in his study in the area of rural Alberta school teaching experiences to compare it to the urban Alberta teaching experience.

> Th(e) immigrant family which had strolled through the prairie town in 1900 before leaving for their distant allotment, would be among the thousands of Albertans affected by the shortcomings of rural schooling. They too must have found it difficult to erase from their minds the images of the town: the store windows filled with so many delights; the comfortable homes along the river, many with their private tennis courts out behind. All remained vivid reminders of the discrepancy between urban and country life. The large brick school in the town...was also impressive (Wilson, 1992, p. 137).

It is clear that Wilson (1992) sees a distinct difference between the urban and rural settings. The urban environment is seen as extremely favourable in comparison to what the rural lifestyle had to offer.

Similarly, the importance of the school house in the rural community has

been widely proclaimed (Palmer, 1991, Vaughn-Roberson, 1983, McLeod, 1981, Charyk, 1973, Drake, 1970), but very little has been documented about the role of the school building in the urban centres throughout Alberta. Many sources reveal that the urban school was often an impressive brick building that looked 'neat and sturdy' (Kostek, 1992, Wilson, 1992, Kostek, 1982, Stamp, 1975). Wetherall and Kmet (1995) have researched Main Street life and the evolution of small towns in Alberta between the years 1880 to 1947, but they never outline the role of the school in the town. The school is mentioned, but its specific location in the town site and the rationale for choosing the specific location are never discussed. Similarly, very few urban school teachers' memoirs discussed the role of the school in urban centres in Alberta. The contrasting importance of the school house in the rural and urban communities has never been examined.

The urban Alberta school teachers' experiences are very rarely mentioned in any research work that has been documented. Brief mentions are made, especially in local school histories (Kostek, 1992, Kostek, 1982, Stamp, 1975), but these limited number of accounts fail to provide an extensive picture of the urban teaching experience. There is no doubt that the urban school teacher had an important role, but it has never been compared to the of the rural school teacher.

Missing Pieces

Through the discussion of differing sources that focus on education in Alberta, it becomes apparent that few detailed accounts have been documented

about the daily experiences and challenges that young female school teachers faced while they taught in Alberta schools. Perhaps it is because the history of women has largely been ignored for centuries and, as a result, there are few writings and sources on female school teachers who taught in Alberta. Patterson (1986) exclaims, "Their lives may not be epic, yet the student of history cannot overlook the fact that each life is a tiny capillary, a vein or artery contributing to the strong heartbeat of the collective experience" (p. 99). Each of the works that has been previously completed gives a brief and limited look into a certain aspect of the teachers' lives. And even though all the works are combined, the end result is not a 'beyond the surface' description of the daily life experiences and challenges of these women. Thus it is important to not lose the teachers' stories to omission and obscure them in the mire of stereotypes of the selfless, lonely but brave schoolmarm, or the ignorant mean-spirited prude (Cordier, 1992). The lives of Alberta school teachers must be accurately described and their true voices must be heard.

Even less research has focused specifically on the rural and urban teaching experiences, and a complete comparison between these two settings has never been produced to date. Patterson (1986) was one of the first researchers to highlight the experiences of rural school teachers, but the experiences of urban school teachers have not been included in any of his work. Similarly, Wilson (1992) sheds some comparative light upon the two settings, but never ventures further to make a comparison. Thus, the experiences of rural and especially

urban school teachers remains largely unexplored, as does the comparison between the rural and urban settings. Without these two valuable pieces of research, an important part of Alberta's rich history remains incomplete.

Chapter 3

Context of the Study

Populating the Canadian West

The population growth in Canada after Confederation in 1867 was decidedly slow. In 1867 Canada's population was 3.5 million, and by 1890, it had only risen to 5 million (Bothwell, Drummond & English, 1990). Agriculture was the chief commodity in the country, but the land in Quebec and Ontario had already met its maximum capacity for agriculture, and if agriculture was to flourish in Canada, there needed to be expansion into the Western part of Canada. Many settlers living in Eastern Canada had decided to move to the American Mid-West in an attempt to obtain suitable farm land where they had ample space to set up a sizeable farm. Meanwhile, Rupert's Land, the name given to the Canadian West at this time, was relatively uninhabited and had an abundance of land which was suitable for both crops and livestock.

In an attempt to persuade settlers to move to the Canadian West, and thus help alleviate the agriculture land overload in Quebec and Ontario, the National Policy was initiated. This policy promised to introduce a protective tariff on foreign-made goods, build a trans-continental railway, and encourage settlers to move out West. As a result of these three provisions, the population of the West rose from seventy-three thousand in 1871 to two hundred fifty thousand in 1891

(Bothwell, Drummond & English, 1990). This growth in population was not however enough to satisfy the Liberal government which had formed in Ottawa in 1886 under Wilfrid Laurier, and thus Clifford Sifton was placed in charge of attracting larger numbers of settlers to Western Canada.

Previous to Sifton's appointment to the Interior Department of government, advertisements and other attempts to persuade settlers to come to Canada had been focussed in Eastern Canada and Britain. Sifton however realized that Canada needed to change its target group because Eastern Canada and Britain had been targeted for several years. Thus, efforts to convince people in the American Mid-West and in Central European countries including; the Ukraine, Austro-Hungary, Poland, Germany, Holland and France (Bothwell, Drummond & English, 1990, Voisey, 1988, Friesen, 1984) to move and settle in the Canadian West were made. By 1913, four hundred thousand settlers had immigrated to Canada, and most of them headed off to the Western Canadian provinces.

The majority of people who migrated or immigrated to Western Canada in the late 1800s and early 1900s moved to and lived in a rural environment (Bothwell, Drummond & English, 1990). Gradually as the prairie provinces became more settled, and as new industries were developed, towns and larger cities were built. The population living in all incorporated cities, towns and villages, of any size was counted as urban while the rest of the population was considered to be rural. The major livelihood for the people living in Western Canada was farming, although there were some industries such as coal mining, oil drilling, railway

construction, and pulp and paper (especially in British Columbia). Wheat was the chief commodity grown in Western Canada, and the economy was firmly grounded in agriculture roots.

Life in Rural Alberta

The climate in the Prairie Provinces, especially noted in Alberta, was both harsh and extreme. Winters were often accompanied with frequent blizzards, gusty winds and bitter cold temperatures while many summers saw crop scorching temperatures, prolonged periods of drought, hailstorms and early frosts. These conditions made farming extremely difficult because many cattle died in the harsh winters and the dry summer conditions frequently brought grasshoppers, poor crop yields and the potential for prairie fires. Alberta was a land of extreme climatic contrasts, often devastating in their effects (Silverman, 1984) and in Southern Alberta, these effects were felt the strongest.

The harvest yield in Alberta between the years of 1905 to 1930 was greatly affected by the extreme weather patterns that prevailed in the Province. The early years in Alberta saw generally average to above average crops, in fact, in 1915, the Department of Agriculture wrote in their annual report that they had an outstanding season, crop results and conditions were better than they had ever been. But by 1917, the first serious problems were starting to appear in the south-eastern part of the province. The spring and summer had been very dry and only light crops were harvested. In the following years, the drought continued to spread, although the northern section of the province was still able

to harvest an average crop. A continuing lack of moisture prevailed throughout the 1920s although there were some near record crop yields recorded during this time as well. Grasshoppers and jack rabbits began to pose a serious problem to the crops, especially in Southern Alberta. Wheat prices also started to plummet during these years, and the agriculture failure that had begun to arise in Alberta was finally climaxed in the Stock Market crash which occurred on October 29, 1929. This Black Thursday was the start of the ten year Depression which dominated the 1930s throughout Canada (Berton, 1990).

Thus, rural life was often seen as harsh, tedious and tiresome for both male and female settlers. Many of the immigrants and those who migrated to the Prairie provinces were young and recently married (Palmer, 1991). For many of these women, their daily activities included providing food and proper shelter for their families, making suitable clothing, doing chores around the farm, and if they had children, looking after them and providing them with a proper education. Neighbouring homesteads were often miles away, as was the nearest town, so isolation was a natural phenomena among many rural women who lived in the Prairie provinces (Palmer, 1991).

The hardships of pioneers often promoted family unity and community cooperation. Churches and schools were usually the first organizations that brought rural settlers together and served as the main meeting place (Palmer, 1991). The one-room school house was often seen as the heart of the community. It was more than just a school; it was also the political, social and

religious centre of the community (Palmer, 1991, Vaughn-Roberson, 1983, McLeod, 1981, Charyk, 1974, Drake, 1970). Debates and spelling bees were organized there and meetings were also held in the school house where homesteaders could voice their concerns about the railway, the price of wheat, and other pressing matters of the time. In some communities, the school served as the local church, offering church services every Sunday and a place to hold a wedding or a funeral. And then there were also evenings of laughter and music when the Friday night box socials and dances were held there (Palmer, 1991, Vaughn-Roberson, Charyk, 1974).

Urban Life in Alberta

Many of the towns and villages that developed in Alberta around the turn of the century were either on railway lines or in areas that expected to be served with railway lines in the near future. The railway company had carefully plotted town locations approximately thirteen to sixteen kilometres apart to ensure that grain elevators would be no more than one day's journey on horse from the surrounding farms. Towns were, in many realities, mini-cities. They had some of the conveniences that the larger Alberta cities had, but the amount and variety of goods, supplies and services that were available were less than in the cities. The Main Street in town often had a hotel, rail road station (if there was a rail line running through town), general store, printing press, clothing stores, restaurants and cafes (Wetherall & Kmet, 1995).

By World War 1, almost every town in the province had a movie theatre

> where people could 'spend an afternoon or evening of entertainment...(and) like movie theatres, cafes and restaurants were among the first businesses to locate on Main Street (Wetherall & Kmet, 1995, p. 223)

The urbanization of Alberta was regarded as a positive step toward progress.

> It was proudly noted in 1910 that fifty (50) towns and villages had been incorporated in Alberta since 1907. There was 'no more tangible evidence of the development of the Province,' because 'all over Alberta there are now towns and villages where one, two or three years ago there was prairie.' (Wetherall & Kmet, 1995, p. 17)

> Incorporation as a town or village became an expression of an entirely new approach to society. In 1909, eight years after its corporation as a town, it was commented in (the town of) Cardston (Alberta) that while incorporation should have meant discarding 'rural conditions', it sadly had not happened: 'when we were incorporated our ideals should have advanced to the status of urban life and conditions, leaving behind us the mud holes, the barb wire fences, frog ponds, cow pastures and race tracks within the limits. Besides all this, we anticipated the grading of streets, laying of sidewalks, installation of water system, electric lights and sewage and the general rehabilitation of every beauty spot within the limits of the corporation.' (Wetherall & Kmet, 1995, p. 18-19)

From this, it becomes clear that not every town that was formed in Alberta experienced the same standards of urban life. For some of those 'towns', the rural conditions still prevailed although the distances between the shops and other conveniences was much less than it was for those living in rural communities.

The population rates for towns in Alberta varied from town to town, and the population in Alberta continued to rise and shift somewhat from the heavy focus in the rural areas. The Census of Canada showed that in 1901, the town of Blairmore had two hundred thirty-one people, and by 1911, that number had

increased to over one thousand. Twenty years later, in 1931, Blairmore's population had grown to include more than one thousand six hundred people. Similar patterns also occurred in the towns of Drumheller, Fort McLeod, Lacombe, Cardston, Peace River and Claresholm (Wetherall & Kmet, 1995)

Emergence of Five Urban Population Centres

In Alberta's early years, two out of three Albertans lived on farms and in small villages, but five urban population centres emerged which remained the 'big five' for three quarters of the twentieth century. These five population centres included Edmonton, which was Alberta's capital city, Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Red Deer (Wetherall & Kmet, 1995, Cashman, 1979).

Permanent settlement outside Fort Edmonton, which was the dominant centre of the Western fur trade, did not begin until the 1870s. The process was slow and hindered by the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) through Calgary in 1883. A branch railway came further north in 1891, but the track stopped at Strathcona, located on the south bank of the North Saskatchewan River. Edmonton was designated as a town in 1892, but as developments in this town continued, it gained status as a city in 1904 (Hesketh & Swyripa, 1995, MacGregor, 1967). In 1905, Edmonton received its transcontinental connection when the Canadian Northern Railway came through the city, and it was also then that the city was designated as the capital of Alberta.

Calgary was incorporated as the first town in Alberta in 1884 with a population of just over 500 people, and nearly ten years later, received city

status in 1893 with a population of nearly four thousand (Tivy, 1995, Foran, 1985). Calgary's economic growth was closely associated with the development of the livestock industry, cash-crops and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway through Calgary in 1883. Rails stretched in all directions from the city of Calgary which solidified its position as the prime distributing centre for South-central, and Southern Alberta. In 1914, oil was struck in the Turner Valley, located close to Calgary, and this first strike was the beginning of the successful oil and gas industry which has continued to be a leading element in Calgary's economic growth (Palmer, 1991).

Coal mining was the primary economic activity in Lethbridge, and large scale mining began in 1885. Lethbridge was quickly formed as a town of approximately one thousand five hundred people when the railway line was completed which connected this mining centre to the Canadian Pacific Railway. In 1897 the Canadian Pacific continued to extend and branch the rail line, firmly establishing Lethbridge as a marketing and distribution centre. Lethbridge was established as a city in 1906 (Den Otter, 1985). The population of Lethbridge continued to rise from just over two thousand in 1906 to well over thirteen thousand in 1931 (Wetherall & Kmet, 1995).

With the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway to the small settlement of Medicine Hat in 1883, "a tent town sprouted up around the station, and slowly a community emerged" (Gagacz, 1985, p. 1114). Dry land farming, natural gas and clay were the three main economic sources for this area. The

manufacturing of pottery, brick and tiles was also established (Palmer, 1991, Den Otter, 1985). Throughout the years, the population of this area grew rapidly. In 1901, there were just over two thousand people residing in this community, and ten years later (1911), over five thousand six hundred settlers had made Medicine Hat their home (Wetherall & Kmet, 1995, Palmer, 1991). Medicine Hat gained its status as a city in 1906 (Den Otter, 1985).

Schools and School teachers

Schools were plentiful in Alberta in both rural and urban locations. One room schoolhouses were isolated dwellings on the wide-open prairies. Often times this building was poorly constructed, allowing the cold winter winds to blow right through the thin walls (Chalmers, 1991). Two-room school houses were more prevalent in the small towns and villages which were sprinkled along the railways throughout Alberta (Cook, 1968). In the large population centres such as Edmonton and Calgary, large red brick schools which housed eight to twelve classrooms were more common (Kostek, 1992, Stamp, 1975)

Many young female school teachers were intrigued by Alberta, and left their families and friends in Europe or Eastern Canada to come West and teach. Hughena Mack, as a young school teacher, wrote in 1912,

> In 1907, we three girls came to teach school in the West. We had come from Ontario homes, which means that for all our years, we had mingled on terms of intimacy with apples, Toronto, school trustees, church union, ladylike people and cents. But of the world outside, we knew nothing, and we yearned with unspeakable yearnings. What with these yearnings and the life of straight lines and squares we were leading, we took on that lean and lofty look characteristic of school teachers. So, our parents, with

> one accord, harkened to our opportunities and allowed us to turn to Alberta, that teacher's revivifer (Mack, 1994, p. 16)

For many teachers who taught in Alberta's rural and urban schools, this was the place to learn and explore new territory. It was here that they were exposed to the many challenges and opportunities that were evident in the West.

Summary

Alberta was a land of opportunities and frequent changes during the first twenty-five years it existed as a province within Canada. Its largely rural population, which was heavily involved in the agriculture industry, experienced many set-backs stemming from the unpredictable climate and unstable economy, especially during the 1920s. Urbanization began to take root especially after the construction of the railway through many population centres in the Southern part of the province, resulting in further economic growth. Many settlers had been told about the opportunities that could be found in this Prairie province, and thousands of people who did immigrate to Alberta, including many young, female schoolteachers, discovered this truth, amid the many challenges that were also prevalent in rural and urban Alberta.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this research study. The findings are presented in a narrative form placed in the context of the time period. Each of the women who speak in this narrative piece are real, as are the stories and excerpts that are revealed.

Setting the Stage

The year is 1931 and each year, teachers from across different regions throughout Alberta have come to meet in a community church, school or hall to discuss pertinent matters regarding educational practices and policies. These annual Teachers' Conventions are held for three days in the last week of April. A formalized lecture and discussion dominates the pattern for the day, while the evenings are less structured to allow for more social interaction. These opportunities for social interaction provide teachers time to discuss experiences that they encounter on a daily basis. The socializing also provides teachers with an opportunity to learn and better understand what life is like for the other teachers who taught in different communities throughout Alberta. Often the teachers who taught in rural Alberta communities would compare stories with fellow teachers who taught in urban Alberta settings. Their conversations often

focussed on the physical conditions, social opportunities, and their respective roles and activities in the district in which they taught.

If an outsider were to mingle and spend an evening in the room during a Teachers' Convention informal social gathering, they would likely be able to hear many interesting stories about different teachers' experiences and challenges, especially in relation to physical, social and societal/community environments. Being a listener to the conversation would also provide an opportunity to identify similarities and/or differences that existed between rural and urban teachers. Because the learning potential from this activity is both optimal and creative, the researcher has decided to allow the reader to step back in time and attend an evening at the 1931 Teachers' Convention.

At the 1931 Teachers' Convention

It is shortly after 8 pm on April 22, 1931. The sun has nearly set, and a quiet darkness has once again settled over the city of Edmonton. Located just off Edmonton's 105th Street is the First Presbyterian Church. Usually it sits empty during the week, quiet until Sunday morning when people enter through its doors to worship God and to hear the Sunday message. Tonight is a Wednesday evening, and oddly enough, lights are glowing through the windows, music and laughter fills the air, and the pews are filled with people. But it is not a church function which has drawn the crowd of people, rather, it is the Annual Alberta Teachers' Convention.

The majority of participants at this year's Convention are women, due mostly

to the fact that at this point in Alberta's history, a high percentage of school teachers are women (Palmer, 1991). As the first cups of coffee are being filled, a small group of young, female school teachers is gathering in the back corner of the room. Each of the women gathered in this small group tonight are simply here to discuss their own situations, and they recognize that their experiences are not identical to those of all rural or urban school teachers in Alberta. Their stories provide an opportunity to appreciate and better understand what is was like to be a teacher in a rural or urban community in Alberta between the years of 1905 and 1930.

Pour yourself a cup of coffee, take yourself back to 1931, and listen to the intriguing conversation that takes place. Muriel Clipsham, a school teacher who taught in both rural and urban schools, began the conversation. She started by talking about an important part of the physical environment, the weather. She talked about the experiences that she encountered, as a rural schoolteacher, during the winter which had just passed.

> It was frightfully cold and there was one blizzard after another. Drifts were piled around the buildings some fifteen to twenty feet high. I wore heavy sweaters and skirts all winter and two pairs of woolen hose, with ankle socks, in oxfords. Over this I put a man's jumbo knit sweater, coat, slacks, high overshoes, leather helmet, woolen and leather mitts. Appearances matter not a whit at forty below zero. (1935, Ch.1,p.8)[1]

Marie Emery Cook, a school teacher who also taught in rural and urban schools in her teaching days, quickly added her experiences about her rural school teaching days to Muriel's comments by saying,

> The snow was deep and the wind blew so a new trail had to be broken twice daily (Cook, 1968, p. 6).

Even though the winter storms also hit the urban centres, only one teacher, Mabel Fleming, an urban school teacher, commented on her experiences with the Canadian West storms and winter conditions.

> The weather has been trying and challenging which have been giving me no end of trouble lately, very cold, very stormy and rough (December 17, 1915)[2].

Margaret Scott, another school teacher who taught in town, specifically, in the town of Barrhead, wished to discuss what part of the weather bothered her. But it was not the wintery cold; instead, she thought that,

> The worst thing about Barrhead (is) the mud. In rainy weather, the street (are) terrible and everyone (has) to wear high rubber boots." (Barrhead History Book Committee, 1978, p. 95).

Muriel Clipsham, a rural school teacher quickly jumped in and reminisced about her experience of walking in the mud.

> September and October were beautiful months, but it rained continually in November, freezing and thawing, so that walking was labourious with ten pounds of gumbo clinging to each foot (1935, Ch. 1, p. 8)[1]

Naturally, this comment brought a ripple of laughter from the group of women, but many also knew that there were days on the Prairies which were no laughing matter. As if on cue, Maisie Cook began to talk about the effect that the periods of drought had, especially in rural Alberta.

> (It) was a dry year in the south. There was no rain until September and the grain planted in the early Spring did not germinate until Fall. The wind blew almost constantly and severe dust storms were common. Visibility was almost nil at times and soil from adjoining grain fields covered the fence posts. Hats joined the ever-present Russian thistles or tumbleweeds in their mad race across the prairie (Cook, 1968, p. 29-30).

Muriel Clipsham went on to talk about the grasshoppers and the devastation that many felt when the skies would not give rain.

> The insects ate everything--leaves off trees, vegetables and even clothing. It was impossible to leave clothes on the line for any length of time without some holes being made. For all its rash promises, that season refused to give the necessary moisture. The hot, dry winds blew up, and soon the top soil was drifting. A cloud would come in the west and we thought 'surely it means rain'. The air cooled, and a few drops would fall, but the wind would rise and a hurricane blow up. The seeds drifted out, and each week the fence posts seemed to sink deeper into the soil. By afternoon the wind would rise and beat around the school in fury. The sky would be hidden by dust and it was impossible to see the blackboard from across the room. Everything we touched was grimy. Such a climate can do strange things to one's sanity. There was always that eager expectancy, tense hope that each cloud would give forth rain. One could see despair everywhere. Yet life went on much the same (1935, Ch. 1, p.13)[1].

Most of the women in the group agreed with what Maisie Cook had said about the eager anticipation and despair that the periods of drought had brought to the people living in Alberta. The teachers living in the urban centres had also seen the devastation that the dry spells had had, but no comments were made by any of those women.

Maise decided to shift the conversation to another aspect of the physical environment and began to talk about the beautiful side of prairie life she had

experienced while teaching in rural Alberta.

> The spring was beautiful when it eventually arrived with crocuses on the hillsides followed by buffalo beans, shooting stars, wild roses in profusion, sage or badger willow with fragrant bloom. The robins and meadowlarks were numerous and added to the joy of the season (Cook, 1968, p. 22).

Nodding her head, Muriel Clipsham chimed in saying that,

> Autumn was lovely. The days were warm and there was little rain--perfect harvesting weather. It was necessary to leave (for school) at seven thirty. The air was fresh and cool. It was good to ride down the road, my school bag in front with books and dinner pail and the pail of oats tied on behind (1935, Ch. 3, p.3)[1].

Although the beauty of the seasons could also be seen in the urban centres, none of the school teachers who lived there commented on their surroundings. Instead, their conversation was dominated by stories about their trip to the Canadian West to their new school house.

The women here tonight began to discuss their reasons for leaving home to travel West and many commented that since they were young and still single, the promises of a new life and possibly a suitable marriage partner were large factors in their decision to move (McIntosh, 1993, Wilson, 1992, Canadian Pacific Railway, 1986). Most of the women knew that The Calgary Herald had reported only a few years ago (1913) that there are many conditions about Calgary which serve to attract young women teachers from Eastern centres and the opportunities of matrimony are plentiful and attractive. A few pieces from the Canadian Pacific Railway's fifty page pamphlet entitled, <u>What Women Say of the Canadian North West</u> were recalled;

> There are lots of well-to-do bachelors who are wanting wives, and good, honest, hardworking girls can soon find homes of their own (McIntosh, 1993, p. 39)

> The country, being overrun with bachelors, no one can hope to keep a girl more than a few months, and in many cases, but a few weeks when she is married and away. (McIntosh, 1993, p. 39)

The young female school teachers who travelled hundreds of miles had known a very different life before coming West. For many, this was their first trip away from home. Annie Gaetz related the events of her trip from Nova Scotia to Alberta:

> In August 1903, after teaching school in my home Province of Nova Scotia for three years, I left by excursion train to take up teaching in the Canadian Northwest. I was twenty-one years old, and filled with the spirit of adventure. My ticket was for Moose Jaw, but when we arrived at Wolseley, Saskatchewan in the early morning, knowing there was a Teachers' Agency there, I was so train sick, I decided to go no further. Through the Agency, I arranged to teach at the Mound Lake School which was thirty-six miles out from Red Deer, the nearest Post Office. According to arrangements, I was in front of the hotel just before 8 in the morning to begin my drive to the country. Since the barrooms were about to open, there was a group of men waiting for their morning refreshments. When I looked up to the top of the double box wagon, I wondered just how to get there. But I was a resourceful gal and we were soon on our way. There were no roads, just prairie trails and mud holes nearly all the way. It snowed and rained intermittently all day. Wagons for some reason were called spring seat wagons, but there were no springs under that seat for I tested it from 8 in the morning until 6:30 that night! (Whitney, Repp, & Creelman, 1968, p. 310)

For others, it was also a difficult trip for them to make, and the romantic images that had been freely promised in the advertisements quickly began to fade. One of the women talked about an Alberta school teacher named Romelia Anne Kathan who had come from East Farnham, Quebec to teach in the West.

She told the women that it was a trip Romelia would never forget.

> She had seen two drunk and noisy fellows driving a team and wagon with reckless abandon. One horse and two wheels of the wagon were travelling over the sidewalk--at that time the sidewalks were about two and a half feet higher than the street. She said, 'If that is what the West is like, I don't want any part of it.' ("Hills of Hope" Historical Committee , 1976, p. 364).

Romelia did stay and teach, but her impressions of the West were somewhat altered after her first real life encounter with its people.

Romelia was not the only pioneer to be disappointed with the true Canadian West. Maisie Emery Cook, commented on her honest impressions of the Prairies,

> Quite naturally, the newcomers found the Canadian West not quite up to the Utopia they had been promised. There was a dearth of schools, churches, roads, bridges, communication, and many of the small amenities which had been left behind in the homeland--but room to expand almost without restriction. There was a plentitude of mosquitoes, early frosts, cold weather, bad roads, flooding streams, isolation, heavy rain, and continuing mud that caused epidemic hoof rot and 'swamp fever' (Cook, 1968, p. 1)

Muriel Clipsham went on to say,

> The Easterner's idea of the West is a place of vast unfenced spaced dotted only by corrals with wild horses inside and cowboys on top singing, 'Home on the Range'. These men always have a glamour about them, they are always young and good looking. I assure you they were very nearly like other human beings in every respect. They have, however, their own peculiar type of humour which consists to a large extent of stringing you. They try to pump you full of the most enormous exaggerations and if you fall for them, that's fun. It was, too, in a way. They knew I was fresh from Ontario, hence a tenderfoot and I could not disappoint them; I swallowed everything (1935, Ch. 2, p. 15)[1]

By now the second round of coffee had been poured, and some of the women began discussing their first teaching experiences. Jean Rowland, a rural school teacher, told her story.

> I hardly need say that conditions that first year (1911) were far from ideal. School was held in the United Church with only one blackboard, poor lighting conditions for a school, and no library, but somehow we managed. One nineteen year old teacher and sixty students from grades one to eight. The frustrating part was that there was never enough time, especially for the beginners. My salary was eighty dollars a month, which was considered good at that time. Many teachers earned less, and often had to wait three or four months for their cheques! (Barrhead History Book Committee, 1978, p. 102).

Maisie Cook piped up to talk about her experience. She discussed the physical elements that were in her one-room schoolhouse that first day she came to teach.

> The school house was small and was equipped with the bare necessities; a little rectangular wood burning heater, desks, teacher's table and chair, a blackboard, erasers and chalk, a broom, a water pail and tin cup, a wash basin, a small wall lamp, a can of coal oil for use in evening meetings, and a register (Cook, 1968, p. 6).

Muriel Clipsham's experience in her one-room rural schoolhouse was very similar. She commented that,

> The school was clean and neat. The furniture was meagre. There were the standard double desks, teacher's desk and chair, a small, half-filled bookcase, a wheezy organ and a rickety extra chair. The stove at the back was an old fashioned large bellied heater (1935, Ch. 4, p. 12)[1]

At this point, many of the school teachers who taught in the larger urban centres began rustling in their bags, and brought out some photographs of the schools they had taught in and also some pictures of their current schools. The

photographs showed brick two storied buildings which could house eight classrooms (See Appendix A). Large windows and a solid-looking front stop completed the building which often stood out among the other buildings in town.

After the pictures were passed around, Muriel Clipsham could not resist commenting,

> When I go to a city school I cannot help comparing it to some of those prairie schools. Here the pupils have every comfort and every possible convenience and device to further their interests and education. There was that lone, faded little building on the bare prairie. Its two acres of yard was fenced off with barbed wire and only prairie grass and sage bush grew inside (1935, Ch. 4, p.12)[1].

Several of the rural school teachers nodded in agreement as they compared the interior of their one-room school house with the schools that they had seen earlier today as they walked through Edmonton. The McKay Avenue School, located nearby to the First Presbyterian Church where they were tonight, was made of brick and had more than eight classrooms. It provided adequate heat and lighting, and its sturdy walls provided the necessary shelter from outdoor elements. Several of the girls who taught in smaller towns in Alberta also commented that although the school houses that they taught in were not quite as barren looking as some of the rural schools were, their schools were still a far cry from the beautiful brick schools that were seen in the larger urban settings in Alberta.

Wanting to add a little humour to the group's discussion, Maise Cook started to talk about her experience of finding a boarding house. Earlier she had

commented that,

> One of the big problems teachers faced in the early part of the century was finding a suitable boarding house (Cook, 1968, p. 13).

And now she went on to tell everyone about one of her experiences.

> My boarding house was a mile from school and comfortable in winter. The landlord and the landlady were fairly young, educated and fairly well-to-do. Board was twenty dollars per month. I was rather amazed at the end of the first month on getting an itemized account of all visitors during the month and a bill for horse feed and stable use, as well as a charge for keeping over night the minister who had called during the storm. Added to my board, the bill totalled thirty dollars, which was half of my salary. On inquiring, I found that they were not in the habit of entertaining company and felt that I was the reason for visitors coming (Cook, 1968, p. 13).

Once again the group shared some laughter after hearing Maise's story. Isabel, a rural school teacher who taught in Wetaskiwin, Alberta, told the group of women how she kept warm in her teacherage during the cold winter nights two years ago,

> I found I could not sleep in the bedroom of the teacherage as it was too cold. I used to pull the lounge up in front of the stove in the kitchen, wrap up warmly, and pile everything possible on top of me to keep warm. My sleep would be broken several times during the night as it was necessary to refuel the small cookstove. However, by strategically placing the sticks of wood and lumps of coal near the lounge I was able to fire the stove without the necessity of getting out of bed (Charyk, 1968, p. 214).

One of the rural school teachers brought out more pictures but these were mostly of the teacherages where her rural school teacher friends had lived in. Most of these pictures showed either an isolated building, a 'lean-to' which was attached to the school house, or a basement suite under the school house. There were some teacherages which looked quite impressive and provided

adequate living accommodations, but the majority of them were not such a welcome sight.

Just then, John Chalmers, a school teacher who taught in rural Alberta as well, happened to walk by and saw some of the teacherage pictures that were being passed around in the group. He too studied them, and commented before he walked on by saying that,

> Although some teacherages (are) adequate and comparable to average town or village residences others provide only the bare minimum of accommodation (Chalmers, 1983, p. 26).

Many of the teachers had to agree with what John had said, especially when the picture of the teacherage in Two Hills, Alberta was passed around. This teacherage was built in the attic of the schoolhouse, and had a twenty rung step ladder to climb in order to get to it (Cochrane, 1981). The teacher's long skirts could easily get in the way and could result in a serious fall or mishap.

Most of the urban teachers lived in town and few complaints about their boarding or living conditions were heard from them. One of the teachers who taught in an urban centre happily commented that her boarding place was "a place away from home" and how this had a positive impact upon her social environment. Her landlord was very helpful and treated her like a daughter. Lottie Lang, a school teacher who taught in the town of Bulwark, Alberta, gave an almost identical report when she commented that she,

> Boarded with Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Hewitt who lived on the original homestead. Mrs. Hewitt was a fun person to live with, and ready to go places anytime. Bulwark was a thriving town, but best of all, there was a

> baseball team of which they were justly proud! (New Dawn Senior's Club, 1979, p. 33)

These two urban teachers had given very favourable reports about where they stayed for room and board, but many of the rural school teachers could not help thinking that some of the other urban teachers probably had not had such favourable boarding places. These experiences however, were not discussed. May Gilbert Allison, not wanting the women to think that all rural schoolteachers had terrible boarding or living conditions, mentioned that she "boarded with Mr. and Mrs. Gaffield, and they treated me like one of the family" (New Dawn Senior's Club, 1979, p. 55) Heads were nodding as May finished her thought, because many of the women knew that for some rural teachers, their boarding place was quite enjoyable, but it largely depended on the kind of family that offered to board the teacher!

By now, the conversation had died down as many of the women were looking at the photographs that had been passed around of the teacherages in Alberta. Some of the rural school teachers began to talk about their social environments and commented specifically how they spent their days. Mabel Fleming noted that she spent many of her evenings marking assignments and preparing school work for the next day (November 1, 1915)[2]. Some of the other rural teachers commented that Saturday would often be spent doing the washing, cooking or tidying up in general. But it was also

> a good day to go into town to replenish the larder, to visit, to get the mail, or to transact business. But the problem of how to get to town six to

> seventeen miles away was always present. (They) could walk, borrow or buy a horse, catch a ride with a family, or ride a bicycle (Charyk, 1968, p. 216).

Lack of reliable transportation for the rural school teacher was interpreted as an inconvenience for the teacher in Hanna, Alberta and the School Board in that school district (Dundee) made special transportation arrangements for the teacher.

> A motion was made and seconded that the parents of the children going to school be responsible for taking the teacher to town on such occasions as Saturdays, holidays, conventions, etc., same to run alphabetically. The party taking the teacher in will not be responsible for the teacher's return, but the next party in alphabetical order shall be responsible. Carried (Charyk, 1968, p. 216).

Looks of surprise clouded some of the urban school teachers, and one of them asked of the rural teachers, "How do you get to school everyday, especially those of you who live quite a ways away from the school?" Blanche Adcock Schon, a rural school teacher who taught in the Rough Meadow School near Stony Plain, Alberta, responded,

> Transportation to school was on foot for most, and a few came on horseback. My walk (is) probably an average one--1.5 miles--and usually enjoyable. In winter it took the first .5 mile to warm up and get the circulation going (New Dawn Senior's Club, 1979, p. 48).

A quick smile and Maisie once again began to tell them about one of her frightening experiences when travelling to school. She reminisced saying,

> I rode horseback to school that spring and took a six year old girl with me. The farmers needed the horses for spring work so the older children walked the three and one half miles. One day my pony developed a limp so we all walked for some days. One afternoon the older ones had gone on ahead and the little girl and I were walking slowly. As we meandered

> along a big brown bear walked out of the bush and sat up on his haunches in the middle of the road about fifty feet away...The bear did not move for what seemed like an hour, but was in reality likely five or ten minutes, and then got down on four legs and ambled slowly into the brush again! (Cook, 1968, p. 6).

Blanche Adcock Schon, the rural school teacher who had spoken earlier about her 1.5 mile trek to the Rough Meadow School, could not help pointing out that she often encountered wildlife while teaching, and it added to her great appreciation for teaching in a rural community.

> The most beautiful view through the windows was seen the day I noticed several pupils looking outside with great interest--at a deer standing motionless in the school yard. We all watched quietly as the deer looked around as though listening, perhaps scenting the air, then with superb grace turned, leaped, and floated over the school fences without apparent effort and bounced away out of sight beyond some poplars. A delightful moment for us all (New Dawn Senior's Club, 1979, p. 48).

Walking was also a common mode of transportation for both urban and rural school teachers. Most of the urban teachers walked the distance to the school house although some were lucky enough to take the horse and buggy. Owning a vehicle was a great luxury, and none of the urban schoolteachers had one, or even had access to one. It should be noted however, that both the rural and the urban schoolteachers would walk to school, but often the schools in the rural communities were further away from the teacherage or boarding place than they were in the urban centres.

There was also a great difference between walking on a prairie trail that often was muddy after an over-night shower of rain, and walking on board walks,

which were more common in the towns. Even today as some of the rural school teachers walked around in Edmonton, they could not help noticing how much easier it was to walk on a level platform, and one that was relatively free of mud and potholes.

As the stories about how some teachers arrived at school were finally dying down, some teachers decided to branch into a new aspect of their social environment. School dances, box socials and annual Christmas concerts were popular events in both rural and urban communities, and these evenings of interaction were both entertaining and stressful for the teacher. They were often seen as major social highlights and attendance numbers were widely discussed. The school teacher who had the greatest number of people in attendance to their event was looked upon as doing 'something right'! Many school teachers greeted the thought of a Friday night dance in the schoolhouse with mixed feelings.

> They always enjoyed such social affairs but at the same time dreaded the inconveniences, the disruptions and extra work that were part of the dances. The precautionary tasks of getting the school ready for the function and then replacing everything afterwards were the worst aspects. (But) from a purely personal angle, the rural teachers always anticipated the dances with much pleasure. It was one of the few chances they had of meeting the people in the area--and maybe some prince charming (Charyk, 1974, p. 196).

Muriel Clipsham smiled and began to tell the girls that,

> After Thanksgiving the 'social season' opens. The men(are) finished with the harvesting and (are) not nearly so busy. From then on, there (will be) a dance in some nearby school every Friday night. About eight-thirty the music arrives (1935, Ch. 1, p. 11)[1].

Maisie talked about how "friends would drop in to visit," and that "social life centred around the Seventh Day Adventist Church in the area", but then she went on to compare these social experiences when she taught in the rural school and how it all changed when she moved to town.

> Life (has) become very comfortable for us and is a far cry from the hardships of the rural teacher. We had skating parties, church group meetings, teachers' gatherings, tennis matches, lodge meetings, and organized groups who explore the coal mine tunnels that honeycombed the earth deep under the town with guides. Good boarding houses were within walking distance from school so transportation was no problem (Cook, 1968, p. 31).

Another one of the urban school teachers who taught in Calgary told about the fun she and other female school teachers who taught in the same school that she did, had had at last Friday night's box social which was held in the school just at the north end of Calgary. These social evenings were filled with much laughter and the beautiful sound of the accordion.

Mabel Fleming explained how often in the evenings she and a group of other teachers who taught in the same urban school that she did, would all go "to ten cent tea at Miss. Rimby's and then I (would) invite all the girls to a party at Mrs. Halhaway's the following Tuesday" (November 19, 1915)[2]. She commented that they would often get together for these ten cent teas to support the Red Cross. This same group of teachers also often met at the High School to organize a Teachers' Association at Rimby.

Everyday events such as shopping were also discussed, but mostly by the urban school teachers. These women talked about how they often spent their

Saturday afternoons in the larger urban centres, shopping at Urquhart's or at Cameron's. With almost a look of envy on their faces, the rural school teachers commented that if they wanted to have a new outfit to wear, they would have to order it from the Catalogue--choosing to order it from either Russel Lang's mail order service, or from the Eaton's catalogue. Quickly Mabel Fleming intervened and said that many of the girls in town also ordered from Eaton's and Russel Lang, but their order would be sent quicker. Mabel said that she sent in her order for underwear to Eatons on November 11th, and on November 22nd, it arrived at her place! (November 11, 1915, November 22, 1915)[2]. Most concluded that such quick service was definitely a result of the fact that daily mail service was delivered in town, but in the rural districts, mail would be delivered once, or maybe, twice a week (Charyk, 1968). Thus it was no wonder that parcels from mail-order companies took much longer to receive when a teacher lived in the rural districts.

As the women continued to talk about urban life, Muriel Clipsham decided that it was time she honestly told some of the rural school teachers that their hardships needed to be kept in perspective because living in town also had drawbacks. She began by saying,

> I had been elated at the prospect of teaching in a town, however small. Not only did it mean much less work, but there would be sports and interesting people to meet I had thought. I was very much disappointed at first because the inhabitants all complained so bitterly of having to live there. 'It was so difficult to get in and out' they would say (1935, Ch. 4, p. 11)[1]

Some of the other urban school teachers smiled at this comment because they remembered saying these exact words to Muriel when she had first come to teach in town. Muriel continued her story by admitting,

> That was very true, for as yet, there was no way but by train. Few people had cars, only about a half a dozen, because the farthest they could go was sixteen miles in one direction and three in another. Although it was difficult to access, I used to wonder why they were not content to just live there, but before many months I was complaining as bitterly as the rest. I still don't know why (though),

she added,

> We had our work and there was plenty of sport to keep us occupied. There were tennis courts and the golf course. In winter there was skating, and we went bob sleighing a couple of times. In spring we fished and rode horseback. There were dances and a few picture shows, and plenty of parties and always we complained. I fear it is the general dissatisfaction of human nature we tried to blame on our confined limits! (1935, Ch. 4, p. 12.)[1].

Again a few smiles graced some of the urban school teachers' faces, but there was also some contented bewilderment in the eyes of some rural school teachers. Perhaps Muriel's comment about how the many social activities and the greater ease of life in the urban settings did not necessarily result in a greater satisfaction with life, intrigued them. Life for rural school teachers was difficult; the work load was heavier, the elements seemed more severe, and the isolation was prevalent, but there were also many opportunities for laughter and contentment in this occupation. Some urban school teachers seemed to have a somewhat easier life because of their geographical location, but this did not necessarily guarantee that, as a result, they would be more content.

Again the topic of conversation changed. Some of the teachers began to talk about the latest fashions that they had seen in the Fall Edition of the Eaton's Catalogue. Each of them had picked out their favourites, but each of the skirts or dresses they chose had similar hem lines. The hem length of the skirts and also the colour of their clothing was something that was closely observed by everyone in the community, especially in the rural districts. Muriel Clipsham related what the rural community thought when she first taught,

> The pupils took in every detail of my clothes, hair, shoes and nails, as they always do, shifting sheepish eyes whenever I turned and looked in their direction (1935, Ch. 1, p. 7)[1].

She then went on to further discuss the impact that the school teachers could have on their societal and community environment.

> Very often they (the female schoolteacher) become leaders in their communities, and influence is sweet to any of us. I doubt very much if young women teachers going in to a new school realize their influence. The girls especially ape their mannerisms and clothes. One teacher who came to Verdant Valley years ago was very pretty, and though a most excellent teacher, many considered her too frivolous. She loved to sing and dance; she loved parties and clothes. Every morning we used to be in suspense just to see what she had on. Those were the days of high boots and hers were always a couple of inches higher than anyone else wore. And then another girl came. She was deeply religious. She cared nothing about clothes or appearance, never danced and was in charge of the Sunday school during her years there. But there were noticeably fewer dances and socials. The other girls of the district spent less on clothes than while her predecessor had held sway (1935, Ch. 3, p. 3-4)[1].

"Speaking of dances", one of the teachers said, "Did you read what the School Inspector wrote about in his report in 1909 about the role of dances in the rural schoolhouse and what happened in MacLeod?" Most of the women

shook their heads, so the teacher responded by saying, "Well, let me read what he wrote,

> The relationship of the rural school to the community is a matter of admitted importance in the development of a country. In my inspectorate, this relationship can scarcely be said to be of a kind likely to stimulate and foster the intellectual and cultural life of the community. It is often asserted that the rural school should contribute to this end through its use as a centre where people may come together to take part in literary and debating societies, concerts, etc., and to hear lectures on agriculture and other things. As a rule, the school does not create an educational atmosphere in the community. Practically, the only use made of most schools as 'social centres' is for dancing purposes. The theory of some educationalists is that if this use of the school is encouraged the social life of the community will be stimulated and the people thus brought together can be led to take a greater interest in educational affairs. But the weakness of the theory in this inspectorate is that the social activity ends in itself. It is true, however, that this use of the school does tend to relieve the monotony and irksomeness which many people, unfortunately, think necessary to attach to rural life. An economic phase of the question is also disclosed in the fact that the admission fee to the dance constitutes the popular medium of contributing to a worthy cause, and large sums have been raised in this way for patriotic and benevolent purposes. But that the educational and cultural influence of the custom is slight seems clear from the way the dance is usually conducted. One 'Patriotic Dance' held recently in the vicinity of MacLeod may be taken as typical of many. Dancing continued from eight o'clock in the evening till six-thirty in the morning. The teacher was present throughout, as well as nearly all the boys and girls in the community upwards of eleven years of age. Apart from any question as to the social value of this use of the school, it cannot be said to contribute materially to the broadening of the intellectual outlook of the members of the community (Department of Education, 1914, p. 88).

Some of the women were quite shocked by the time this excerpt from the school inspector was finished. Dances were popular, especially in the rural communities, and they often continued until about two or three in the morning, but never had these women heard about a dance that was held in the school,

lasting through the night until the sun came up the next morning! They did concede though that

> the general tone of behaviour at most dances was maintained on a high plane. If a person did not conform to the moral standard expected, the adults of the district banded together to get rid of the unwanted guest even if it meant the use of force. It occasionally happened (that) strangers ventured into the district from an outlying town or community, and not being familiar with the social standards of the local area, brought with them the customary flask and the resultant incongruity. They were informed politely by the local vigilance committee that their company was not welcome. If this failed to produce the desired results the unwanted migrants were escorted outside by as many brawny arms as the occasion demanded and with enough enthusiasm to convince them that to return would be rash and risky in the bargain (Charyk, 1974, p. 193).

In many of the women's experiences, the need to physically remove someone from the school house socials was never seen, but it was not hard to believe that this could be something that some of the teachers had faced in their experiences.

Maisie Cook had spoken earlier about what activities often took place in the one-room schoolhouse she taught in. She had told how

> For community recreation, there were basket or box socials and dances. Music for the dance was usually provided by one or two violinists, and perhaps, an organist. They charged a fee of from two to three dollars and played for at least eight hours. The balance of the funds would go toward the School Library or other worthy causes. The distances travelled in cold sleds attested to the popularity of such community gatherings (Cook, 1968, p. 9).

As well, many others had commented about how popular the box socials and dances were, especially in the rural communities. Very few similar stories were told by urban teachers. It seemed that most of the parties were held in homes or

other community places in town, and the school was truly used for school-related functions. One of the urban school teachers commented that for the past few years, the Edmonton Public School Board was also complaining about the use or rather the lack of use that was made of the school buildings in town. She read to the group what he had written back in 1912.

> It is unfortunate that but few of the districts realize the value of these school buildings from a social standpoint. So little is the idea for general use of the school appreciated that even the Board rarely uses the building for its own meetings. In a few cases, the school is the focal point of the community activities. Where the school building is thus in frequent use, and the people come to see the great value of a common meeting place, there is never any difficulty in having the building in good condition, properly equipped and frequently, tastefully decorated (Department of Education, 1912, p. 45).

Several of the women smiled at the final comment that the inspector made about how the frequent use of the school would often result in its being properly maintained. But the fact that the schools could be used for social activities, which were still school-related, was not denied.

Just then, one of the Edmonton Public School teachers present here tonight, commented that all the Edmonton area teachers had been invited to the McKay School for an evening activity and discussion. On the invitation it had said,

> As a means of mutual introductions among Edmonton city teachers, now and otherwise, and to provide a long-desired social 'get-together', the recent meeting of the Edmonton Public School Association has decided to organize such a gathering (from 8:00 pm until 10:15 pm), and then an informal dance from 10:15 for about 30-45 minutes (Department of Education, 1924).

"Yes indeed," commented another of the Edmonton Public School teachers,

"they definitely are trying to make the school a social avenue as well!"

It had been widely concluded earlier in the evening by Muriel Clipsham that the rural school teachers very often become leaders in the community, and have a great deal of influence upon people's lives. Many rural school teachers commented that they "were often seen as the guiding light in the community" (Vaughn-Roberson, 1983, p. 193) and that their every move was constantly examined. Maisie Cook, one of the school teachers who taught in a rural community of Seventh Day Adventists, reemphasized how the activities of the rural school teacher were closely watched by all when she quipped,

> My lunches were watched carefully as ham sandwiches and spice cakes were taboo in their religion, as were tea and coffee. As a result, I took milk to drink and lived on egg sandwiches so they would not be too concerned about my after-life! (Cook, 1968, p. 12).

Muriel Clipsham also told about her first days in the new urban centre that she taught in a few years back.

> There was a dance in town--one of the big Italian dances of the year I believe. Nell and Mrs. Hades were going and insisted that we go too. Jessie refused, since school started the next day, she wished to be fresh for that. I decided a good impression was more important than a dance, so I stayed home too. It took us quite a few weeks to convince everyone we were not anti-social, (1935, Ch. 4, p. 6)[1], she conceded.

Each of the women agreed that as a school teacher, and especially as a school teacher in a rural community, it was important to understand the people in the community and learn to get along with them. Muriel offered a story about the misery that resulted for her when she did not get along with the people in one of the rural communities she taught in.

> That year will always remain an unhappy memory. I was unhappy and unpopular in the district. I knew it but did not care. The Dawns, who had no children in school, were the only ones who ever asked me to dinner, or took any notice of me. They and the Waldoff's were the only people I knew there, yet I was severely criticised in everything I did. All the rest of the district resented the fact that after Christmas, friends from town came for me every weekend. I can truthfully say that I did not in any way neglect the school. I worked hard! (But then there was another time where I was told when teaching in an urban centre, that) I had been a social asset to the town and it would be a loss if I did not stay (1935, Ch. 3, p. 9)[1].

The relationship that the female school teacher had with the people in the community was largely dependent upon the personality of those people (which differed from community to community), and the teacher's willingness or unwillingness to adhere to the 'guidelines' that the community had decreed. The community had a definite impact upon the school teacher, but in many communities, she was also able to mould some of the people in the community. These thoughts were the consensus of the group of teachers here at this Teacher's Convention, especially after hearing such varied stories and remarks. Lottie Lang told how in the urban community she taught in,

> There were quite a number of young people...and that made the community a lively place to live (New Dawn Senior's Club, 1979, p. 33).

Mabel Fleming told about meeting so many people in the town she taught in, and she also told the group stories about her friends and nearby neighbours. Her entertaining stories about the evening teas and nights spent visiting and playing cards spoke about how much she enjoyed the days when she taught in that Alberta town [2].

Muriel Clipsham spoke about the fact that when she taught in town, she lived with four other teachers (Nell, Bea, Jessie Johnson and Muriel Law). Even though she had so many people around her, still she commented,

> I found those first few weeks lonely because Nell and Bea had much to talk about. They visited people frequently and were very close friends. Though Jessie Johnson and I were about the same age yet she (Jessie) and Muriel Law were much more congenial and went on long rambling walks nearly every evening. I often went with them, but I never got to know either one very well (1935, Ch. 4, p. 8-9)[1].

The loneliness that Muriel felt when teaching in an urban school came as quite a surprise to the rural school teachers, although some had remembered what Muriel had said earlier on in the evening about how teaching in an urban centre was not 'all glittering gold.' But hearing it directly from a teacher who experienced that brought an element of reality to the situation.

By now the evening was drawing to a close. The group of teachers who had spent the last two hours discussing the rural and urban experiences of schoolteachers, and sharing their stories and pictures had finally begun to disperse. Muriel Clipsham, however, still had a few things left to say, especially about her rural teaching days. A handful of rural teachers gathered close around her to listen to her thoughts and experiences. One area of discussion that had not come up all evening was romance, and Muriel definitely wanted to discuss her thoughts about marriage, especially about marrying a city man.

> In the country, there is a much greater incentive to marry than in the city. A man actually needs a wife. There is no more undesirable life than that of a bachelor farmer.

A few eyebrows were raised at this comment.

> In fact, "I can not see why practically all of them marry. City wives have created their own positions. There was no actual need for them. In rural communities a young man on his own farm needs help to look after his house and himself. He needs companionship that is always available. Few men enjoy a life in which they see no one for days at a time. It is not wondered then that teachers can and do marry in rural communities. I do not say that all teachers are greatly sought after, but any teacher could marry in almost any district, if she would. Why is it that so many Eastern girls and English women seem to think life is wasted unless they get a man? They must be devoted to Western thrillers, for it is to the West that the disappointed ones eventually come on their man hunt! (1935, Ch. 3, p. 2)[1].

Muriel continued,

> In several districts which I know, the boast is, 'No teacher leaves here single. We marry them off!' And it is true. Teachers in rural districts are always appraised as to their value as prospective brides. I was once told that the average teaching career for women was three years, and I believe it to be true! (1935, Ch. 3, p.1)[1].

Many rural and urban school teachers commented that they had heard the same thing, and some even told about their sisters, aunts or cousins who had taught for only a short time before getting married. After they were married, they were not allowed to enter the teaching profession, especially in the urban centres. Some of the women commented that they had known of some women who continued to teach even after they got married, but they were only 'allowed' to teach in a rural community.

But many of the women also knew that the standards were more relaxed in rural schools in Alberta because of the rural school problem. The rural school problem was often defined as the shortage of qualified teachers who were

willing to teach in rural one-room schools. One of the School Inspectors from Alberta wrote a piece in the 1909 Department of Education Report and focused specifically upon the rural school problem and the potential reasons for its existence.

> What may be termed a rural school problem is the frequent change of teachers. One rarely finds a teacher in the same school for two successive terms. It may be conceded, however, without entering into details, that teaching a school at a great distance from a railway point involves many features which, to say the least, are not attractive. This is one aspect of the problem but I regret to say there is another. Some school boards are paying good salaries to teachers who are merely time servers. Leaving the pecuniary long distances to and from school for the infinitesimal recompense they receive at the hands of some teacher too indifferent to realize the important and responsibility of her position (p. 50).

The Department of Education in 1911 issued a report in which it also commented upon another issue in the rural school problem. It outlined that ,

> Teachers who have received their professional training in the eastern provinces of Canada and have had at least a few years' experience there, find it difficult, apparently, to adapt themselves to Western conditions. The effort required for a careful reading of and for a practical working knowledge of the Alberta curriculum appears to be strenuous for them. There is a tendency prevalent among Eastern teachers of more or less experience to rest upon their laurels won in the East and to reap in the West, where salaries are good and vacancies are many, the harvest of their previous hard and labourious efforts where conditions were not so pleasant. Many have left good positions, in the middle of the term, at a few day's notice, to accept more lucrative posts elsewhere. In the interest of the welfare of rural pupils, particularly, good teachers should be encouraged to hold their positions at least three years (p. 62).

It was a well known fact among these women here tonight that the length of

stay for teachers in rural communities was often quite short. As the number of people in the room had dwindled down considerably, this small group of rural school teachers realized that their evening of socialization and discovery had drawn to an end. But not being able to resist sharing one last story, Muriel pulled a few of the rural school teachers together and told them about an experience (being a rural school teacher at the time) she had had at an earlier Teacher's Convention.

> I met one girl with exactly the same qualifications as myself, though with more experience, and her salary was nearly two and a half times what mine was. She had taught in the city for several years. During our conversation she spread her hands and remarked, 'My nails are a mess. I can only afford a manicure every two weeks now. We were cut 10% you know, and haven't had a raise in two years.' I looked guiltily at my own hands that never had a professional manicure in their life and were still red and rough from bringing in the wood and emptying ashes (1935, Ch. 1, p. 16)[1].

Muriel's last story put a small smile on some of the women's faces. They looked down at their own hands and saw that they too were not smooth or without callouses, but yet, "There was no shame in that" some of them thought. Muriel's voice once again broke into the silence but this time she did not have another story to tell. Rather, a reminder about the content of tomorrow's 10:00 am lecture. "The rural school problem is the item of discussion," she commented, "And they have given us a few papers to read in preparation for tomorrow." Nodding in remembrance, each of the women turned and bid Muriel goodnight. But each of them knew that before they would finally drift off to sleep, there was still more information to read and process.

Reflections on the Evening

As an individual eavesdropping upon the conversation that had taken place tonight at the Alberta Teacher's Convention, it is abundantly clear that each of these women had shared some wonderful stories. Each of them seemed to enjoy their teaching job, although several complaints had been voiced both from rural and urban school teachers. They each had talked about their physical, social and societal/community environments and how these environments had affected them, and also their ability or inability to affect them.

Tonight many of the rural and urban school teachers talked about the deep snow through which they had to travel each day in order to get to school, the fierce blizzards, and the icy cold that prevailed throughout the winter. It was days of stormy weather such as these teachers had described that made transportation to the school so difficult, especially since many had to walk or ride a horse for lengthy distances. These winter storms were often fatal as exposure to the extreme elements, but yet each of the women proudly told about how they were able to conquer the elements.

The social activities were definitely limited in the rural communities, but the rural people still had wonderful opportunities for entertainment, and the school house, often with the school teacher's leadership, provided this setting for social interaction. In the urban centres, there were also Friday night gatherings, but they did not seem to unite the community as was seen in the rural communities. The sense of community that could be experienced in the rural communities was

a prominent feature that was critical in the teacher's perspective about teaching in a rural community. It seemed like the women who had a 'pioneer spirit', who had the opportunity to be a leader in the community and who thrived on the opportunity, were the school teachers who could honestly claim that they enjoyed their rural school teaching days.

It was the women who, after two days, one week or perhaps even one complete month, decided that the rural school teacher's role was not for them and found a position in urban schools. Teaching in an urban school, at least when discussed by the group of urban school teachers here tonight, was great for some, but for others, even though there were fewer trying circumstances, it was not an enjoyable experience. The role as a female schoolteacher, and the ability to affect others while in that role, in an urban centre was not comparable to what it was in a rural community. In the rural communities, there were few prominent citizens. Doctors and ministers often travelled throughout the area a few times each year, but they did not have a permanent residence in the area. Thus the teacher was often the leading citizen in the rural community, and she had the 'power' to influence the people around her. In town, there were many other prominent citizens who were looked up to by the town people. There often was a doctor, mayor, lawyer, minister or a banker, and usually these other people were men. Thus, these professionals often held the respect and commanding authority in town.

Being an outsider mingling in and listening to the conversations at the Annual

Teachers' Convention's informal social gathering has given the researcher an opportunity to further understand the experiences of some rural and urban school teachers who taught in Alberta between the years of 1905 to 1930. Twelve women told their stories and although they seemed to enjoy their teaching job, several complaints were voiced both from rural and urban school teachers. As a group, sharing their experiences and pictures, they discussed physical, social and societal/community environments and commented how these environments had affected them, and how in turn they had or had not been able to have a reciprocal influence on these environments.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter provides a further discussion of the data and as a result, it shows how this study has fulfilled its two-fold purpose. Areas of further research are also discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the completion of this study provides the researcher with responses to two research questions, and in doing so, the application of the Human Ecological Framework with historical data will also be discussed.

Responding to the Research Questions

The research questions that were asked in this study are as follows:

1. Is the impact of the physical, social and societal/community environments upon the female school teacher, and her reciprocal impact on these environments different for a female school teacher who taught in a **rural** Alberta community between the years of 1905 to 1930 than it is for a female school teacher who taught in an **urban** centre in Alberta between the years of 1905 to 1930?

2. If there are any differences, what are the possible explanations for these differences?

Thus, the discussion is presented in the following three sections. First, the impact of the three environments upon the school teacher; second, her impact as a school teacher on these three environments; and third, explanation of the differences that occurred between rural school teachers' experiences and urban

school teachers' experiences is described.

The Impact of the Environment on the School Teacher

The physical, social and societal/community environments did have an impact upon both the rural and urban teachers. The physical environment included the following factors: climate, condition of schoolhouse, home of the teacher and geographical conditions with which each teacher had to deal. Generally, teachers were limited in the reciprocal impact they could have on this environment. Each of the teachers was affected by the harsh Alberta climate and unable to change it. The most they could do was to dress appropriately and learn to safely deal with the elements. Construction and appearance of the school house was another aspect of the physical environment that each of the teachers was faced with, and again, teachers were relatively powerless to change it. Some of the rural teachers did, however, participate in the beautification of the school yard by planting trees and flowers (Department of Education, 1906, 1911, 1921). Two other aspects of the physical environment, included the teacherage in the rural settings, and the distances and 'road conditions' that both rural and urban teachers had to travel on to reach the school house. These two aspects were also largely tangible items that could not be altered by the teachers' actions or behaviours. Yet, both rural and urban teachers had to learn to adapt to and cope with these aspects of the Canadian West.

The social environment was another component that greatly affected the lives

of rural and urban teachers, and which was also controlled by influences and forces that were greater than they were. For those who had left their families in Europe, the United States or in Eastern Canada, there was an inability to communicate with them daily or even weekly. In both rural and urban settings, long distances and infrequent mail service often hindered communication efforts to parents and friends who lived 'back home'. Many school teachers commented about their sense of loneliness, even those school teachers who lived in urban centres and had more activity and people around them. Most teachers in this study commented that they had many opportunities to intermingle with people in the community, and that invitations for supper, or, in the rural communities, for room and board, were often extended to them by their pupils. It was however, also noted that there seemed to be mixed feelings about the social environments by both rural and urban school teachers. For example, Maisie Cook especially hinted at this when she commented that, although there was an abundance of activity in the urban centres, many of the teachers continued to complain about their social life. From this, the researcher concludes that although the teachers were somewhat powerless to influence what social activities and friendships they had, it was also their personal characteristics that influenced their social surroundings and opportunities although many did not seem to admit this was an opportunity and act upon it.

The societal/community environment was also an environment which had great impact upon the school teachers. This environment was mainly

constructed by society/community and the resulting rules and regulations had also been decreed by society and the specific community. Proper conduct of the teacher and the perceived role of school teachers and of the school house were largely shaped by past tradition. The school teacher was closely examined from the minute she arrived on the railway stage till the minute she left the community. Sometimes she would stay for a year or two, but other times it would merely be for a week or even a few days; often a direct result of the opinions and behaviours of those in the community. The community could often dictate what she could wear, how she could act, which social activities she could participate in, who she could be in the company of, and the list went on. Many of the teachers in this study commented that they had learned what was tolerated in the community in which they presided and lived by that; there were also those who were not well liked in the community, and that situation made it difficult for them.

The Impact of the School Teacher on the Environments

As discussed above, the school teachers in both rural and urban settings were influenced by the physical, social and societal/community environments, and in many ways, teachers were limited, or in some cases, completely powerless to reciprocate. The researcher does, however, perceive that rural school teachers definitely were more influential than urban school teachers. Being great distances from the 'school authorities' and often being one of the most prominent citizens in a rural community, the rural school teacher was in a

more favourable position to influence and impact the community. In many ways she had more freedom, and many of these women exercised this liberating role.

There were many similarities between the physical and social environments of both rural and urban school teachers. The physical environment, which included housing, climate and clothing, was in many ways similar. The severe weather conditions that prevailed throughout Alberta during these early years were experienced in both rural and urban communities, although the impact of the weather may have been greater in the rural communities. This was because travelling distances were greater, available help was further away, and shelter belts were few. Many of the homes, including the school house and teacherage were merely two buildings alone on the flat prairies. "Rural conditions" (mud holes, barb wire fences, no sidewalks, frog ponds, cow pastures) also obviously existed in rural settings and caused general discomfort among some school teachers, which to varying degrees, may not have been as prevalent in some urban Alberta centres. There were however some small towns where there was a prevalence of rural conditions in the 'newly urbanized settings' (Wetherall & Kmet, 1995). Few of the urban school teachers who were included in this research study commented about their physical environment.

The social environments of both rural and urban school teachers were also relatively similar. Definitely the urban centres had larger populations than the rural communities did, but the struggles to mix and mingle existed for teachers in both settings. There seemed to be general dissatisfaction with this environment

which pervaded into the closer-knit rural communities as well as the larger urban centres.

When comparing the rural and urban settings, it was noted that the rural school teacher seemed to have a greater impact upon her societal/community environment than the urban school teacher did. Many rural teachers commented about their role in the community, but none of the records concerning urban school teachers mentioned their reciprocal impact upon the urban centre within which they were teaching. The urban teacher had an impact upon the setting she was in, but it is uncertain whether or not she had the same influence as the rural teacher did.

Explanation of Rural and Urban Differences

The response to the second research question was much more difficult to develop. Because data sources were limited, especially surrounding urban school teachers' experiences, the researcher is hesitant to develop a response based on subtle differences between the rural and urban school teachers' environments that may be presented in this study. The rural school teachers talked openly and at great length about their role in the community and how they were in a powerful position. The conditions which surrounded the rural teaching experience, especially the rural school problem, were assumably large contributing factors to the degree of influence rural school teachers were given. As stated earlier in this study, the school teacher was often one of the most prominent citizens in the rural communities, so often times she was seen as the

guiding light (Vaughn-Roberson, 1983), and she was able to use her position to influence members of the community. In urban settings, school teachers were often one of many other prominent citizens, including the minister, doctor, mayor, banker, lawyer, or other higher ranking individual who presided in the specific urban centre. A further explanation of possible reasons why differences occurred between rural and urban school teachers' lives will be proposed in the suggestions for future research in the last section of this chapter.

Application of the Human Ecological Framework

This research study was conducted using the Human Ecological Framework which views individuals in constant reciprocal interactions with their environments (Sontag & Buboltz, 1988). As outlined earlier, the three environments that were used in this study were physical, social and societal/community. The Human Ecological Framework was incorporated into this research in three main approaches: selection of data sources, focussing the study and analysis of the data.

Selection of Data Sources

The Human Ecological Framework provided a selection criteria for the sources that were considered for this study. Most of the sources that were selected captured and/or aided in exploring a holistic perspective of female school teachers who taught in Alberta between the years of 1905 to 1930. Because there were limited data sources available, the researcher feels that although this selection criteria was compliant to a large degree, it was not

always possible to guarantee that the data which were available provided a holistic view of teachers' lives. This was especially true for the urban school teachers. Data regarding this group of women were extremely limited.

Focusing the Study

Secondly, the Human Ecological Framework provided the focus of the study. It was anticipated that study would provide rich, holistic descriptions of the lives of female school teachers who taught in rural and/or urban Alberta between the years of 1905 to 1930, and discuss the reciprocal nature of the impacts of three environments and the teachers. The three environments; physical, social and societal/community, were captured for both rural and urban school teachers. Since there was more data available regarding the rural experience, a richer, more holistic description of the physical, social and societal/community environments resulted for the rural experience as compared to the urban experience.

Analysis of the Data

The application of the Human Ecological Framework in the analysing of the data was successful. Separating the lives of the rural and urban school teachers into three environments uncovered unique similarities and subtle differences that existed. If the research design supported only one small part of the teachers' lives, or if their lives were merely seen as a whole, rather than as the sum of the parts, these findings may not have emerged during the analysis of the data.

Suggestions for Further Research

Through the application of the Human Ecological Framework into this research study, the researcher is content that this study has provided a new and unique perspective on rural and urban school teaching during the settlement years in Alberta, and by doing so, has provided a missing piece of Alberta's rich history. The researcher does not propose that **the** missing piece of Alberta's educational heritage has been found, but rather, that only **a** piece has been found, and this piece is indeed limited. Increased efforts are needed in this field before researchers are able to claim that the entire piece of Alberta's educational heritage has been found.

Research in the History of Education in Alberta

Further exploration must be undertaken regarding rural and urban school teachers' lives. The urban school teachers' experiences have largely remained hidden, perhaps because they are extremely limited in number, they are almost impossible to locate, or perhaps they have never been written. In order to explore the lives of these women further, the location of these sources, if it exists, must be discovered. If the sources can be found, further research must explore the urban school teachers' lives. Their lives are unique and need to be better understood. It is hoped that when urban school teachers' lives are as 'well understood' as the rural school teachers' lives have been, further comparisons between these two geographically different groups can be undertaken.

Research in Human Ecology and Historical Accounts

Further work needs to be conducted in applying the Human Ecological Framework to historical data. Although this study could clearly show that there were no substantial differences between rural and urban school teachers' experiences, even though minor differences were recorded, there may have been opportunity to show more substantial and varied differences if other specific environments from the Human Ecological Framework had been selected. The Human Ecological Framework identifies three broad categories in describing the environments that each human being interacts reciprocally with: near environment, human-built environment, and social-behavioural environment (Vaines, 1980). These three environments are further defined in relationship with self; partner and parent-child relationships; family dynamics; informal network relationships; institutional relationships; socio-economic constraints and privileges, and cultural ideologies; and interrelationships with local, bioregional and global, natural environments (Allen, Barr, Cochran, Dean & Greene, 1990). If historical data could be obtained which related to all of these components, studies which could be conducted would be phenomenal in their scope. Data which would address each of these components of an individual's life would enable a researcher to truly describe the individual's life in a holistic manner. This research study used the three broad categories, and because the pertaining data was limited in some of the environments, a holistic picture of the twelve school teachers' lives could not be reproduced.

It is important to note that because the data are historical, they can no longer be added to in the future unless new information is uncovered. Most of the women who taught in rural and/or urban schools in Alberta between the years of 1905 to 1930 have passed away and thus there is no opportunity for clarification or further questioning. Historical research is difficult because,

> Only a part of what was observed in the past was remembered by those who observed it; only a part of what was remembered was recorded; only a part of what was recorded has survived; only a part of what has survived has come to the historian's attention; only a part of what has come to their attention is credible; only a part of what is credible has been grasped; and only a part of what has been grasped can be expounded or narrated by the historian (Gottschaltk, 1956, p. 45).

And only a part of what can be expounded upon or narrated by the historian is related to some or all of the environments that are discussed in the Human Ecological Framework. Preliminary work must be done for research studies that are guided by the Human Ecological Framework, and which use historical data sources. It must be evident in the data sources that the specific environments which relate to the Framework can be found. Further research could aid this process by creating additional components for each of the environments. For example, what factors would facilitate in understanding the role of the institutional relationship environment, or the environment which looks at the relationship with self? Identifying these components can assist the researcher who is using historical data to determine whether or not the available data will enable him or her to explore certain environments and subsequently respond to

formulated research questions.

Another area which is in need of further investigation is in terms of measuring the usefulness of the Human Ecological Framework to guide a research study with historical data. Very little work has been done in the past using the Human Ecological Framework with historical data (Schvaneveldt, Pickett & Young, 1993). Previously, the structural-functionalist theory was more widely accepted. This theory assumes that society placed certain rules of function on human beings (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1993). For example, society placed rules and regulations upon school teachers in Alberta in accordance with their dress and role in the community. Thus, the teacher was a product of functions that had been enforced upon her. In many ways, the structural-functionalist theory touches upon the application of the Human Ecological Framework in that it recognizes the impact that certain environments have on individuals, but it fails to include the reciprocal impact that often occurs. The Human Ecological Framework does, however, allow for exploration of the reciprocal impact, and thus this researcher sees that it has a lot to offer researchers who use historical data. However, continued work needs to be completed to further validate the strengths and limitations of this theoretical framework.

The last area which needs to be further explored lies specifically in the area of family research. It might be assumed that the role of the family would be paramount in the social environment for both rural and urban school teachers.

However, the family did not emerge as one of the prominent factors in this environment. Rather, it seemed that the community, especially for the rural teachers, 'became her family'. A specific study to further examine the role of families in the female school teachers' lives needs to be completed. This piece of research would greatly add to the understanding of the social environment.

End Notes

[1]Muriel J. Greene, was born in the Verdant Valley district west of Drumheller, Alberta. In 1921 she moved with her family to Arnpoir, Ontario and attended North Bay Normal School. From there she moved back with her family to the Drumheller area, and taught at Galarneauville, south of Hanna. She subsequently worked at one-year teaching posts at Creighton, Cassell Hill, Verdant Valley, Nordegg and Longsdale school districts. Later, in 1934, she married Mr. Clipsham and returned back to Ontario. The Muriel Clipsham fonds consist of her reminiscences of her teaching career. Her diary is thought to have been written in 1935, concentrating mostly on her early years as a school teacher in Alberta. (Glenbow Archives and Museum, M 233)

[2]Mabel Fleming grew up in Lacombe, Alberta and trained as a teacher. She was the first school teacher in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta (1912-1914). From there she taught in Rimby and married Sinclair Mellis. The Mabel Fleming Fonds consist of her diaries dated from 1915-1916. (Glenbow Archives and Museum, M 380, PA 501, PD 35)

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Appendix A

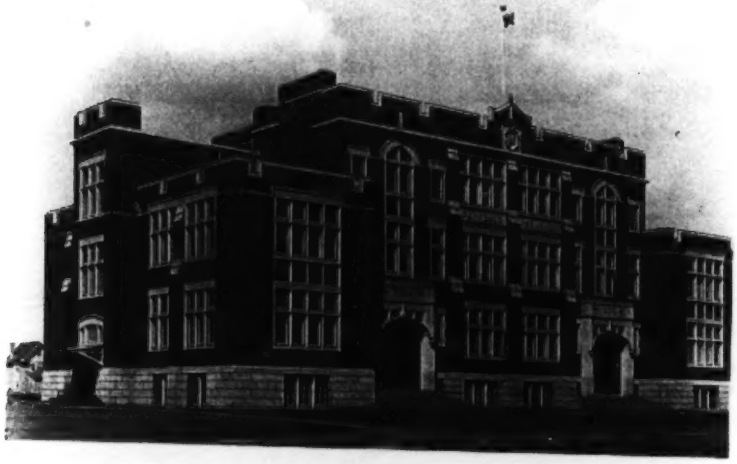

Figure 1. Parkdale School Building, Edmonton, AB, 1914
(Photo courtesy of the Edmonton Public Schools Archives and Museum P85.9.12)

Figure 2. Eastwood School Staff, Edmonton, AB, 1923-1924
(Photo courtesy of the Edmonton Public Schools Archives and Museum P85.4.15)

Figure 3. McKay Avenue School, Grade VIII, Edmonton, AB, 1914
(Photo courtesy of the Edmonton Public Schools Archives and Museum P85.8.7)

Figure 4. Classroom Scene, Lethbridge, AB, 1915
(Photo courtesy of the Edmonton Public Schools Archives and Museum P85.3.26)

Figure 5. King Edward School, Grade VI, Calgary, AB, 1916
(Photo courtesy of the John S. Sandercock Library NA2517.3)

Figure 6. Reta and Verla Garton ready for the 4.5 mile drive to Allister School, Rivercourse, AB Date unknown
(Photo courtesy of the John S. Sandercock Library NA1703.2)

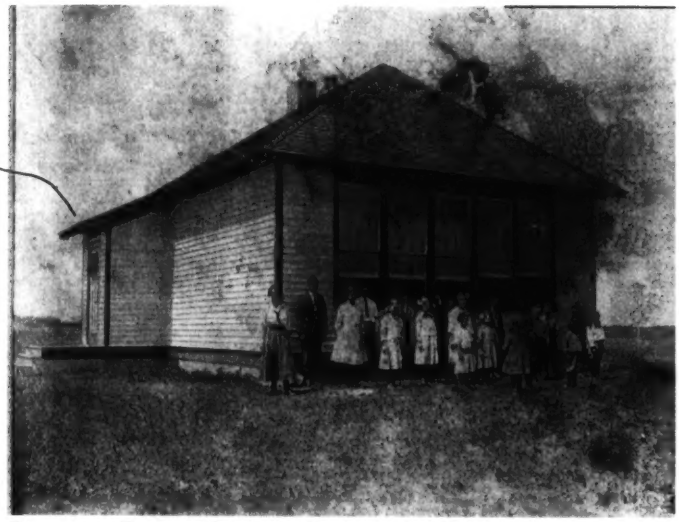

Figure 7. Beaver School, Castor, AB, 1918
(Photo courtesy of the John S. Sandercock Library NA3470)

Figure 8. The whole class tidying up the grounds and planting trees and flowers, Spring Hill School, Pigeon Lake, AB
Date unknown
(Photo courtesy of the John S. Sandercock Library NA2586.1)